

# THE GEOGRAPHICAL BASIS OF NATIONAL POWER

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## INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately there exists today widespread misunderstanding or even ignorance, not only of basic geographic factors which in large measure direct every major step taken in world politics, but also of the influence that natural environment plays in the survival of nations. A broad knowledge of geography is essential in any attempt to gain an understanding, if only in part, of the numerous problems confronting people throughout the world (Fig. 1). These problems, though usually of an economic, political, or cultural nature, generally have a definite geographical



FIG. 1. Geographic study is basic in analyzing domestic and world problems.

foundation. From a thorough and critical geographic study one should be able to discover the basis as well as the essential characteristics of man's unceasing competitive struggle for existence and recognize that the means by which men and women of a given region secure their livelihood reflect adjustments to physical conditions.

In order to endure, a state must first of all provide complete protection against all enemies, both domestic and foreign, for each individual living within the bounds of its jurisdiction. Secondly, it must afford freedom of opportunity whereby each citizen can gain a worthy means of livelihood. In view of these two great responsibilities a nation should take every necessary precaution to assure its people of

security from all anxiety, fear, or danger. The inhabitants of the United States or of any other country cannot be free to enjoy an *abundant life*, which is rightfully theirs, if compelled to live under the economic, political, and cultural domination of another state. And yet there are always national entities which attempt by various devices to gain permanent supremacy over others, even though it usually results in much unwarranted suffering and cultural destruction.

A few far-seeing individuals dream of forging all nations into a voluntary democratic federation, the activities of which would be largely devoted to bettering the welfare of humanity with complete respect for the rights and privileges of each member of society. However, such an Utopian ideal still seems far beyond the grasp of mankind and thus a world of realities must be faced, a world filled with uncontrolled human emotions and passions. The people of the United States should become aware of their national insecurity and the dangers which confront them; they should be deeply impressed by the one great principle—as human beings each man, woman, and child is a vital, throbbing part of the world in which they live.

The American people cannot afford to remain unaware of the intimate relationships existing between geography and human activities, for the United States holds a unique place in world affairs due primarily to the favorableness of its geographic position and environment. This nation is the only major state with direct access to both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans which is capable of exerting tremendous political pressure because of its actual as well as potential power. World leadership is open to the American people; they must be ready and willing however to grasp this commanding position. Such an opportunity demands that each individual be well informed, particularly in social sciences, so as to gain a richer comprehensiveness of the guiding principles of modern society. The people of the United States will have to develop a *global concept* if they are to play a vital and successful role in world affairs; the earth must be viewed as a single integrated unit and a realistic approach taken to present problems.

Mental laziness and utter disregard for personal responsibilities has led the people of this country, time after time, into a sense of false security as only too well revealed by the late war. Such a situation cannot be continued if the nation is to avoid ultimate and complete destruction. There is a great need for careful analysis of the intricate pattern of American domestic and foreign policies as well as thorough understanding of the urgency for resource mobilization in the interest of national security. In order to safeguard its position as the arsenal of democratic principles, the United States must have actual as well as potential military strength, for power has no meaning unless backed by adequate armed support. Mere recognition of defense requirements is not itself ample to safeguard the future. The citizenry, through the degree of its interest and active participation in national security measures, will determine the safety of the country.

#### EXPANSION AND NATIONAL POWER

A desire to explore unknown parts of the globe, and the hope on the part of many to find fabulous wealth in undiscovered lands, has caused men to travel into all parts of the world. The quest for hidden wealth has been carried down through the ages and it may well be expected to continue as long as man inhabits the earth. Phoenician traders secured tin from the mines of Cornwall; merchants of Genoa and Venice collected silks and spices in the Orient; Spanish conquistadores drew vast treasures of gold and silver from the mines of Middle and South America; and French voyageurs gathered cargoes of priceless furs from the streams and woodlands of what is now Anglo-America. The search continues, and men go on struggling through fever- and mosquito-ridden swamps, across wind-swept arctic and saharan deserts, and over towering mountain ranges, always carrying in their hearts the burning desire to find resources that will bring power and wealth as well as ever-

lasting fame. The United States ranks foremost among the nations in this search, seeking new and greater mineral possibilities, additional agricultural products, and valuable medicinal materials.

It is largely the geographic conditions, such as space relations (location, size, and shape), land forms, climate, land content (soils and minerals), and native vegetation, which strengthen some states and weaken others. These several conditioning elements, coupled with population numbers and distribution (Fig. 2), have great influence on international problems and, consequently, do much in shaping the attitudes of people throughout the world toward peace and aggression. The direction a state expands is dependent upon both geographic and human factors, but as

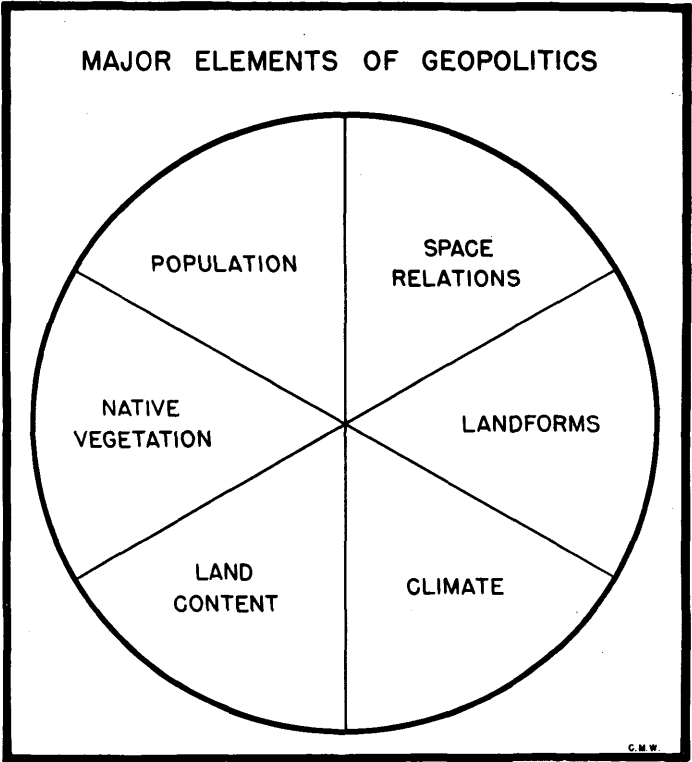
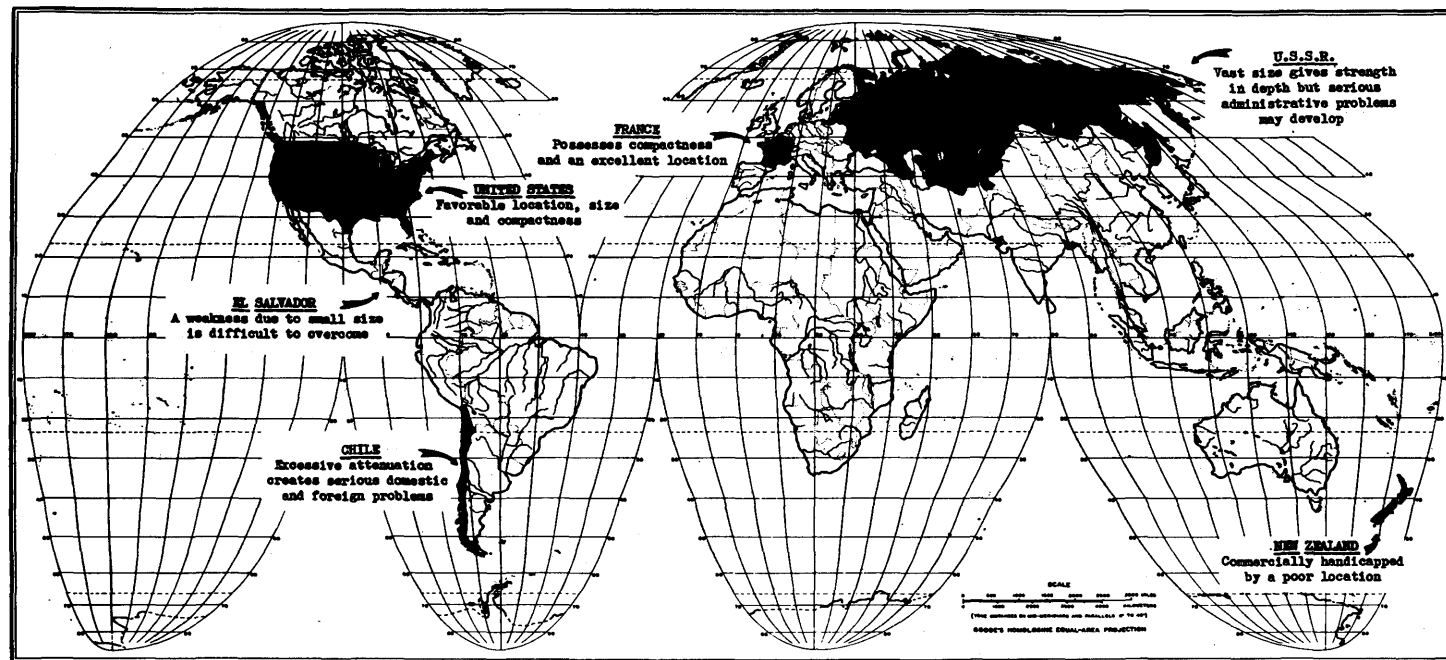


FIG. 2. The success or failure of a nation to become a world power is dependent primarily on the major elements of geopolitics.

a general rule the stronger states move into adjacent territory which may be either sparsely populated or poorly governed. In many instances expansion is more or less incidental but often becomes part of a national ideal and heavy pressure develops for *lebensraum* as expressed by Germany and Japan on numerous occasions. Formerly the right to expand was chiefly a matter of which state, having adequate power to maintain itself, took control first. If the area was so situated as to command broad areas of land or water, or control strategic lines of communication and transportation, it greatly increased the power potential of the occupying nation. The acquisition of suitable land, sea, and air bases often creates many international problems because in time of war such bases may assume strategic importance. However, expansion carries with it certain elements of weakness



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HENRY A. LEPPARD, EDITOR

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FIG. 3. Space relations largely determine the economical and political development of a state.

inasmuch as the borders of a state may become increasingly longer and often not readily defensible in a geographic sense; the Great Wall of China was intended to correct the weakness incurred by an overexpanded state.

A leading objective in colonization has been the hope of discovering minerals of definite economic value. Although the economic value of colonies or dependencies may be seriously questioned, it should be recognized that they do possess four definite geopolitical values, namely: (1) usually give political prestige to the holder; (2) represent in many instances a source of manpower, especially for military considerations; (3) may offer strategic bases during economic or military conflicts; and (4) possibly furnish a suitable outlet for immigration from the holding power. Island possessions such as the East Indies or Hawaiian group often become stepping stones to world power, at times serving as critical outposts.

#### SPACE RELATIONS

(Fig. 3)

*Location*—The position of places and resources on the earth's surface is of great importance to a state, for security as well as industrial development. It is of paramount consideration in analyzing a nation's actual and power potential since both are mainly dependent on the total distance of that country from other force centers. Many locations are considered *strategic* and in time of peace may seriously influence trade, while during conflict they may serve as important bases for military operations. Location plays a major role in the mobilization of a nation's resources and largely determines their degree of accessibility, a factor which no state can afford to ignore if expecting to survive in a world harassed by international conflict.

*Size*—Since areal extent affects both the development of a state and its role in international affairs, the importance of space cannot be dismissed lightly. Although a relatively large area is not in itself indicative of power, it may usually be regarded as a prerequisite and therefore the desire for more land often furnishes an incentive for a nation to engage in armed conflict. Size measurably determines the vulnerability of industrial establishments and transportation-communication nets even though they may be fairly well decentralized; the security of population centers is likewise affected. In many instances the land area of a country is such that it affords the people an opportunity to become large in numbers; in other situations it is much too inadequate for the needs of an expanding population as occurs in Haiti and Japan.

Protection afforded by great depth adds much to defensibility regardless of whether the attack is made by air, land or sea, or a combination of all three. In periods of international strife, a nation with good depth can carry through military operations on the perimeter while mobilization of manpower and protection of industry is made possible in the more central parts of the country. The state with a densely populated core surrounded chiefly by sparsely occupied territory, is in possession of a definite advantage over one not so constituted. It needs to be recognized, however, that depth may become a liability to the defender when that nation takes the offensive, especially if the *scorched earth* strategy is applied by either side in retreating.

*Shape*—The shape of a state also has direct bearing on its economic, political and cultural life as well as on the mechanics of warfare. Throughout the history of nations there has always been the desire on the part of some to round out their territory, even at the expense of a peaceful neighbor. Compactness makes for political unity and greatly facilitates transportation and communications, and the mobilization of industry, labor, and military forces in times of emergency. However, if compactness is not combined with large size, the vulnerability of the state is considerable, especially to modern aerial attack. In case of excessive elongation

(Chile offers an excellent example) the assailability of any one section of the country becomes a major problem. This elongation may also cause serious internal weakness due to a natural tendency for inhabitants to develop strong sectionalism.

*Land Forms.*—The greatly varied land forms of most states considerably influence international relations and the execution of military operations. The arrangement and distribution of mountains, plateaus, and valleys determine to an appreciable extent the condition of other natural factors which circumscribe in most instances man's activities. Location of transportation and communication lines, industrial and commercial centers, and the distribution of population result mainly from varying topographic features. The world's great cities and areas of dense

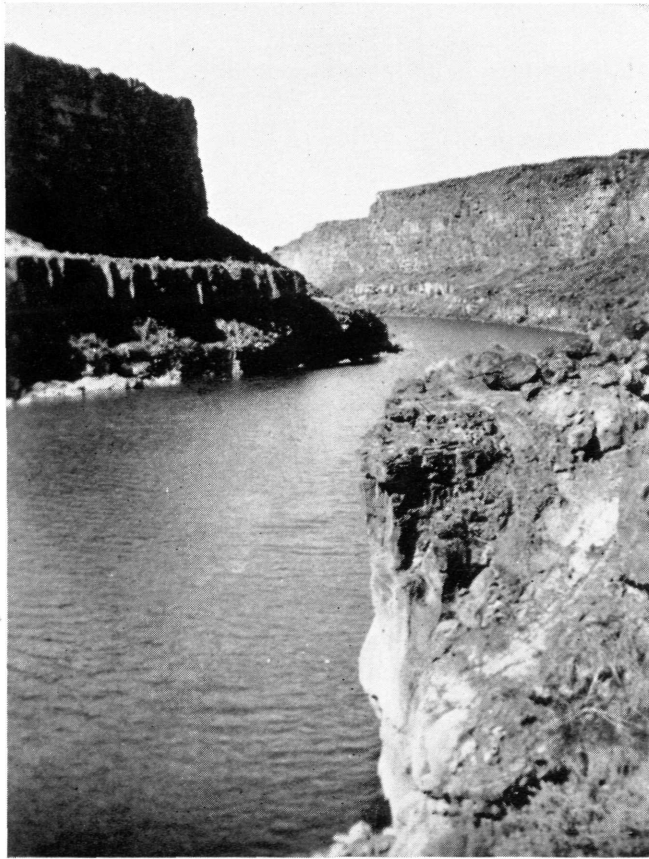


FIG. 4. A stream bordered by steep cliffs, while interfering with commerce, tends to restrict boundary conflicts.

rural population are found chiefly on low-lying productive plains or on the lower slopes and broad valleys in the somewhat rugged highlands. Terrain may serve as a pronounced barrier to the flow of goods and to movements of people, but in so doing it also restricts the possibilities of conflict (Fig. 4). In many instances international boundaries have been rearranged in order to take advantage of certain physiographic conditions as in the case of the French-Spanish border.

A majority of states possess both land and sea boundaries which, depending upon the country's topography, may represent an asset or a distinct liability.

Coastlines usually constitute an important item in national power, so much so that landlocked states tend to seek direct access to the world's sea lanes. If successful, such action necessitates the building of a navy in order that a country may not only defend its coastline exposure but consider itself a sea power. Insular states or those whose borders are peninsular or predominantly coastal can be expected to maintain a navy and air force as first lines of defense. Configuration of a coastline largely determines a maritime state's vulnerability to naval attack; if a modern nation possesses numerous good harbors, the naval forces will no doubt be prominent. On the other hand, if the coast affords few suitable indentations for harbor development, the air force may well be expected to occupy foremost position in the military establishment.

#### CLIMATE

Climate occupies a leading place in the economic, political and cultural relations between states since international problems often have their beginning in pronounced climatic differences. To a large extent climate determines the health



FIG. 5. Semiarid regions offer little encouragement to settlement unless the land is fertile and suitable amounts of water are available for irrigation.

and energy of mankind, having direct effect on the accuracy and speed with which people work. Regions either extremely hot, cold, wet, or arid, are generally sparsely populated and fail to attain a high degree of civilization (Fig. 5). The development of powerful states has usually taken place in the more humid parts of the earth possessing intermediate temperatures; these regions occur mainly in the middle latitudes. In time of conflict, climate has often proved an outstanding ally of the defender as well as the invader. Nearly all military operations are scheduled so that certain favorable weather conditions may be present, particularly for offensive strategy; at times an entire military campaign is decisively changed due to the unexpected advent of cold, fog or rain.

The productivity of a state depends chiefly on climate, a factor which in turn largely determines the availability of water resources, the nature of soils, and the type and quantity of vegetable and animal products raised. Some climates are characterized by only slight changes in temperature or precipitation from season to season while others experience marked variations during the year. Fluctuations in temperature, and the amount and distribution of precipitation, have much influence on the habitability of any given region. A state large in area, such as China, the Soviet Union, or the United States, can greatly benefit from the fact that it includes within its boundaries a wide variety of climates, each one contributing to the diversity as well as to the balance of its productive capacity. The success or failure of many economic and industrial enterprises is directly traceable to conditions of climate.

#### LAND CONTENT

In order to become a world power, a state must either have essential natural resources within its borders or else the power to guarantee access to foreign supplies at all times. The uneven distribution of the world's resources is largely responsible for a desire on the part of governments to own or control productive areas in various parts of the globe. Coal, petroleum, iron, copper, tin, cotton, rubber, wool, meat, sugar, tobacco, and wheat are critical commodities in a bid for national power. Of these, iron, copper, coal, petroleum, cotton, and rubber are basic raw materials for an industrial economy. A state lacking sufficient quantity and variety of food, minerals, and other raw materials for satisfactory economic development, is dependent on foreign sources to supply its deficiencies. In view of this situation many nations continually strive to devise means whereby the raw materials it lacks domestically can be secured elsewhere; a state often adopts a national policy calling for aggressive military action in case other measures fail in securing adequate resources. It is poverty in raw materials which usually makes for international conflicts, sometimes gradually involving most countries of the world.

The endeavor of a state to become self-sufficient is a natural outgrowth of the fear that results from numerous disquieting world conditions. A country which attempts to practice such a policy in respect to its total economic needs however, can never find a prominent place among world powers because no single nation, not even the United States or the Soviet Union has a complete array of vital resources. Self-containment on the part of any modern nation is impossible. The effectiveness of national power is largely determined by a state's capacity for industrialization which, in turn, is almost wholly dependent upon the availability of essential raw materials. The outcome of any international conflict depends mainly on whether one or the other of the warring countries can maintain an adequate supply of vital raw materials in case there is a severance of extraterritorial transportation and communication lines, thereby preventing the flow of outside materials. However, it should be remembered that not only must a state possess adequate resources but its people need to have the faculty of utilizing them to the best advantage.

The United States is perhaps the world's richest and most powerful nation. The development of its economy has been largely governed by a wealth of readily available raw materials and the ability of the American people to utilize them effectively. It is also considered to be one of the most self-sufficient countries and yet, in spite of a considerable array of domestic resources, approximately thirty per cent of the nation's basic raw material requirements, many of strategic importance, are secured from foreign areas. These sources of supply, especially those of extracontinental origin, present a serious weakness in American defenses because of the vulnerability of supply lines, particularly to sustained aircraft and submarine attack. The United States can not maintain itself in the face of



powerful aggression unless it possesses suitable and readily available domestic raw materials or has absolute control of foreign sources of supply which can be safely transported even in periods of international conflict. The success or failure of the nation to fully meet requirements for national security will depend chiefly upon its ability to secure and utilize adequate supplies of vital materials, regardless of world conditions.

*Soil.*—Soil is the basic land resource and should be regarded as the most valuable of all natural resources since it provides, in the form of vegetable and animal products, the subsistence of mankind. The abundance or scarcity of food production, a serious factor in security as well as the foremost requirement for national power, largely determines the economic, political, and cultural development of a people. Countless other basic necessities, including a broad variety of raw



FIG. 6. Broad areas of fertile, well-watered plains are an important asset in a country's bid for world power.

materials for industry, are produced from the soil. In many regions throughout the world, agriculture is the predominant occupation because suitable climatic and soil conditions are present for satisfactory plant growth. No state can adequately maintain a fairly dense population, on an agricultural base or otherwise, if it does not possess sufficient amounts of productive land and the means whereby the fertility of the land can at least be maintained (Fig. 6) unless the food deficiency is taken care of by imports.

The soil makes possible a great variety of valuable foodstuffs, such as beans, corn, fruits, potatoes, rice, sugar, wheat, cacao, coffee, tea, opium, spices, tobacco, and livestock products. From it comes directly or indirectly, the textile fibers with cotton, rayon, silk, wool, abaca, flax, henequen, jute, and sisal of greatest importance. The fats and oils are also products of the soil, the more necessary of which are butter, lard, and oleo fats, and castor bean, coconut, corn, cottonseed,

hempseed, linseed, olive, palm, peanut, poppyseed, rapeseed, sesame, soybean and tung oils. All of these products hold a significant position in the economy of any industrialized state, especially if that political entity seeks to become a world power.

*Minerals.*—The value of minerals in the production of energy and their use as raw minerals in industry cause serious clashes between nations; they are bound to be more frequent as exploration and development of deposits is extended. Next to agriculture, mineral resources are the most critical element in national sufficiency, regardless of whether a state is at peace or engaged in world conflict. Economic sufficiency in minerals is improbable for any state because their distribution is so uneven in variety as well as in quantity. Nations must depend on



FIG. 7. Fertile grasslands encourage settlement and tilled crops tend to replace the native vegetation.

international trade and exchange to meet their requirements. Minerals are exhaustable, and while reserves of some occur in adequate quantities, others may be expended during the present century unless they are used wisely and conservatively. Declining domestic reserves is a specter which no state wishes to face because of the realization that the outcome of international conflicts depends largely on the availability of raw materials or adequate substitutes.

The Industrial Revolution gave a great stimulus to mining and although the number of commercially important ores was small, manufacturing nations offered encouragement to mineral explorations. Among the many minerals now necessary for satisfactory economic development, bauxite, coal, iron, and petroleum hold first place in the economy of every industrialized state. Other minerals occupying commanding positions are as follows: antimony, asphalt, asbestos, chromium, cobalt, copper, diamonds, graphite, iodine, lead, manganese, magnesium, mercury, mica, molybdenum, nickel, nitrate, platinum, phosphate, potash, quartz, silver,

sulphur, tin, tungsten, uranium, vanadium, and zinc. Unless a state possesses adequate domestic supplies of these minerals or has complete control of foreign deposits readily accessible at all times, there is little possibility of that state ever becoming a world power.

#### NATIVE VEGETATION

The distribution of native vegetation corresponds closely to the arrangement of climatic types. Observation shows that forests grow most luxuriantly if rainfall is sufficient throughout the year, with dense stands of large trees in the areas of greatest effective precipitation. The forested areas give way to parklands and grasslands (Fig. 7) where certain conditions of drainage and soil, or external disturbances, prevent normal tree growth; also where, with decreasing annual precipitation, the seasonal distribution of rainfall becomes more marked. As



FIG. 8. Ranching is the dominant industry in semiarid regions possessing nutritious grasslands.

aridity increases the short grasses, desert shrubs, and numerous other drought-resistant plants displace the tall grasses and forests of the sub-humid regions.

Ready access to forests and forest products is of much importance, and states in possession of large stands of commercial timber are indeed fortunate because they can, if necessary, become independent of foreign sources. The forests of every continent, even Australia, are being drawn upon more and more for lumber, wood pulp, and tannin. Likewise the demands are heavy for camphor, cinchona bark, coconut husks, cork, kapok, oil-bearing nuts, and rubber. Then too, the requirements of modern technology appear to grow even greater as more and more timber is converted into clothing, plastics and numerous other products. The large powers own or control most of the world's forests, not only in the middle and high latitudes but in the tropical regions as well. These same states also possess or control the vast grasslands (the Pampas excepted) which, if carefully

managed, are a constant source of wealth in the form of animal products (Fig. 8). The world's pasture lands have outstanding value, especially where they form the major resource underlying the national economy of such countries as Argentina, Canada and Australia. A large part of the humid grasslands in the middle latitudes have been brought under cultivation and now produce a substantial part of the grain needed in areas so densely populated that domestic food supplies are grossly inadequate.

#### POPULATION

The physical factors already presented have in themselves no geopolitical importance unless mankind occupies the land. Population, provided it has suitable capabilities and vigor, is without question the most important of the prerequisites for national power. A state needs people, not only to settle upon the land, but to develop the available resources. In periods of international conflict a nation must provide adequate manpower on the home front as well as on the battlefield. However, it would be a serious mistake to consider population figures alone and disregard quality. In some instances large numbers of people may prove a liability, especially when a state lacks suitable mineral resources and broad tracts of fertile, well-watered plains. Another liability may be that of language differences since a diversity of languages tends to divide a population, thereby considerably weakening the power potential of a nation. Switzerland is the outstanding exception.

#### CONCLUSION

The conditions which bring about conflict between states are numerous as well as exceedingly varied, and in most instances the contributing factors are closely mingled together. International problems tend to become world-wide in scope. Since both defense and offense are based largely upon human and natural resources in addition to technological advancement and industrial strength, the people of the United States must go forward with intense, harmonized endeavors so as to make the country powerful and self-reliant. In view of the fact that no state can maintain its economic and industrial life if denied free access to the world's widely scattered stores of raw materials, it is imperative that the American people adopt a strong position of preparedness as long as the possibility of international conflict remains. A nation caught unprepared can no longer hope to secure adequate time to mobilize and prepare its defenses.

Because the heavy demands of international conflict tend to weaken a state through rapid depletion of a wide variety of highly valuable raw materials, the United States needs to (1) possess a carefully prepared inventory of its total available resources in order to know, insofar as possible, the reliance the nation must place on extracontinental sources; (2) determine areas from which the country can draw vital materials, especially those localities accessible even in time of war; and (3) thoroughly investigate the possibilities of synthetic products so as to be in a position to replace if necessary the raw materials now secured from foreign countries. Also a rigid set of conservation policies should be established in order to prevent the present serious drain on natural resources.

The American people have a destiny but they must make manifest the pattern to be followed and demonstrate their moral greatness and political ability for world leadership. Economic, political, and cultural ties with all parts of the earth must be recognized and their importance fully acknowledged. Each citizen of the United States has a personal stake in the fortunes of mankind—every action or policy of his Government will continue to greatly influence the order and magnitude of world events. This nation, like any other, cannot escape the physical or moral effects of either peace or war, and therefore the big task ahead is to control these effects to the best advantage, a task which can not be accomplished without adequate foresight and military power.